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ABSTRACT

Convinced that the results of educational research generated over the past two decades could be of practical value to teachers, the American Federation of Teachers (AFT) decided that the union could develop a dissemination mechanism designed to bridge the gap between research and practice. The National Institute of Education funded an AFT proposal to pilot this process, and a two-year program was launched in January 1981. The project staff, after talking to teachers about their concerns, decided to focus the project on research findings related to classroom management and effective teaching. Programs were developed and implemented in New York City, San Francisco, and the District of Columbia. Each program site had a local site coordinator, and 53 teachers served overall as TRLs (Teacher Research Linkers). In the pilot program, TRLs met with AFT program staff in training sessions held about once every three-and-one-half weeks. At these sessions, "translated" research studies were reviewed, and between each session, TRLs were required to implement some of the teaching strategies suggested by the research into their classrooms. TRLs shared this information with other teachers. Implications for teacher training using a method such as this are discussed. (JMK)

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The American Federation of Teaachers Educational Research And Dissemination Program

Lovely H. Billups

American Federation of Teachers

Historically, there has existed a gap between educational research and classroom practice. The exchange of research information has largely been limited to researchers among themselves and/or with college and university professors. In its original form, research is rarely of length, form or language that can be used by most classroom teachers. Moreover, the sometimes contradictory nature of research results causes skepticism by potential teacher-users who are often confused about which "authority source" to accept.

Traditional methods of disseminating research to teachers have been largely unsuccessful. Much research information gets as far as a state education agency or a district central office and then "reappears" as mandated programs for teacher implementation under the supervision of central office people and school administrators. Teachers who are expected to carry out the program usually have been excluded from the developmental process. The result has been that the direct implementers of the instructional process with students remain aloof from the educational research base. Often, this contributes to poor practical application of research concepts.

Philosophically, the leadership of the American Federation of Teachers (AFT) has long been inclined to believe that teaching is more than an art. It is also a science for which skills can be acquired by those who perform as teachers. Convinced that the results of educational research generated over the past two decades could be of practical value to teachers, AFT decided that the union, as an organization of professional peers, could develop a dissemination mechanism designed to bridge the gap between research and practice. NIE funded an AFT proposal to pilot this process and a two-year program was launched in January 1981.

Based on interactions with teachers through the Educational Issues Department, AFT realized that teachers held as a priority among their concerns a desire for help in better managing the classroom environment in which the teaching/learning process takes place. Disruptive student behavior, they re-

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ported, was inhibiting their effectiveness as teachers; hence, AFT decided to focus on research findings related to classroom management and effective teaching. In distinguishing between the two areas, which are interdependent, we decided to identify classroom management studies as being those related to the behavioral or managerial aspect of teaching and teaching effectiveness studies as those related to the instructional process (Weber, 1980).

The AFT project was a unique undertaking. First, the union broke stereotypical bonds by taking a strong leadership role in the professional aspect of teachers' lives by collaborating with researchers, thus bridging a tremendous gap. Second, NIE funds were used for direct dissemination of research information to teachers. Third, teachers participated in an educational program on the basis of their individual worth as experienced practitioners without the threat of administrative judgments, negative evaluations or district mandates.

The two-year NIE funding period provided for program development and implementation in three urban pilot sites: New York City, San Francisco and Washington, D.C. As part of the process, a report documenting project outcomes was produced by the three project staff members who were hired to design the program and provide technical assistance to the project sites. The project staff consisted of two veteran classroom teachers who also had experience as teacher trainers and program developers. Much of their time was spent in the field carrying out local site development and training. Another member of the staff had experience in research usage and functioned as a technical assistant whose primary responsibilities were research identification and translation. The Director of the project was also Director of AFT's Educational Issues Department. All three staff members contributed to the writing of research training materials which resulted in the production of an *AFT Educational Research and Dissemination Training and Resource Manual.*

Identifying the Research

Project staff, with assistance from a three-member Advisory Board (Ann Lieberman, Teachers College, Columbia University; Lee Shulman, Institute for Research on Teaching at Michigan State University and presently at Stanford University; and Beatrice Ward, Deputy Director of Far West Educational Laboratory) identified usable research by establishing and then applying certain criteria. One of the major criteria was that the research addressed needs as perceived by teachers; a second criterion was that the research concepts were conducive to practical application in the classroom. Research findings which *could not* be replicated by classroom teachers either individually or collectively were not seen as usable in this teacher-oriented program. Additionally, the research selected had to be generic in scope, having implications for use across all grade levels and disciplines, since the teachers with whom we worked were teaching classes from pre-school to high school. Moreover, the findings from the research had to be fairly consistent in that they stemmed from a "validated" body of knowledge which consist-

ently signalled a clear message about effective teaching practices. Finally, we used studies that were *translatable*, meaning that the statistical data was already interpreted. In some cases, original studies and/or specific researchers were consulted for clarification. Research studies by Anderson, Berliner, Brophy, Doyle, Emmet, Evertson, Fisher, Kounin, Gage, McDonald, Rosenshine, Soar and Stallings were among those suggested by the program's Advisory Board. Based on our experiences with these researchers, we were able to broaden our network of resources.

Selecting Teachers To Work in the Program

Adhering to research findings on effective dissemination practices which advised that loyalty to the governing organization is an important factor in promoting effective participation, we identified loyalty and commitment to the union as one criterion for selecting program participants. We decided to designate these persons as TRLs (Teacher Research Linkers). In addition to union loyalty, we sought out teachers who were perceived as "good teachers" by their peers, were willing to learn, willing to try new ideas, and who were *trusted* and *respected* by their peers. Later we discovered that it was important for TRLs to be willing to commit ample time to the program, to be willing to express ideas and opinions, and to be able to share what they learned with other teachers. Each of the pilot sites used a process unique to its local needs in identifying these teachers as well as the person who would serve as Local Site Coordinator of the program. Aside from the three Local Site Coordinators, fifty-three teachers served as TRLs in the pilot program; the largest number of participants were at the New York site and the smallest group was in San Francisco.

Involvement of the TRLs

Teacher Research Linkers met with AFT program staff on an average of once every three-and-one-half weeks. Research training sessions were devoted to discussion and review of the "translated" research studies, which were always mailed to the participants well in advance of the session. We decided that it was more advantageous to the adult learner (Kidd, 1973) to have previous contact with the materials so that discussions could be held on a peer-equity level than to have a pedagogical expert-lecture-learner approach.

It was important that we attempt to neutralize teachers' negative attitudes about the value of educational research. Most of the TRLs were, at point of entry into the project, as leary as other teachers on classroom application of research concepts. We consistently reinforced the nonthreatening, nonjudgmental aspects of the process and demonstrated that we valued teachers as individuals, recognizing their personalized teaching styles as being

very important to the ways in which they would assimilate the research information into their practice.

We found that teachers enjoyed making contributions to the discussions based on their classroom experiences and that they tended to question or propose changes, based on their teaching experiences. We emphasized that we valued their input as practicing teachers and that often the research findings would not be "brand new" to them but would serve to validate effective practice. Sometimes we used a portion of the training sessions to work through training activities which were developed as classroom-oriented experiences to make the research concepts more realistic to teachers. These activities involved role-playing situations, classroom simulations, and case studies, and were for the most part designed by the two experienced teachers on the AFT program staff.

Between sessions, TRLs were required to implement some of the teaching strategies suggested by the research in their own classrooms. Decisions on what to implement were made by each TRL, based on documentation of research-based strategies that were currently incorporated into their teaching practice and those which they felt they would like to try. Feedback on the results of these efforts was delivered to the group at the next session. This proved to be vital information in terms of "personalizing" the application of the research at grade, school or district levels. TRLs would report "This does not appear to be effective with middle-school-aged children," or "I found that my second graders reacted very positively to this change." Feedback was also forthcoming from other teachers in the schools. TRLs reported that as other teachers noticed changes they had made, e.g., room arrangement, they would inquire as to why the change had been made and how it was working.

Dissemination

Many TRLs began their duties as disseminators at the one-to-one level. This supported our concept of concentrating on building-level dissemination to reduce teacher isolation and to provide continuous on-the-spot support to teachers who used the research techniques. For years, our membership had complained that often they are inserviced by outside experts who are inaccessible to teachers once they have completed their presentations. Teachers say that they have often abandoned innovative practices because of a lack of these back-up services. Therefore, our TRLs were encouraged to share at the building level and to participate in large group sessions primarily as a means to encourage more in-depth involvement with the research, rather than one-shot workshop presentations.

Some of the TRLs, especially those from New York City, were experienced teacher trainers (Teacher Center-Teacher Specialists). Where the TRLs were experienced, dissemination of the information started almost as soon as the TRL was comfortable with his grasp of the material. At the other sites, we had to develop the TRLs as "experts" on the research knowledge and also

help them to develop skills as disseminators. This involved a four-step cycle: training, planning, practice, and presentation. We shared information on Adult Learning Theory to help TRLs work with other teachers and we held in-group practice sessions during which TRLs developed effective ways to present the research information.

Eventually, 53 TRLs across the three sites, in addition to members of the AFT program staff, had reached most of the staff in the 40 schools where TRLs were located, in addition to another 2,500 teachers who attended system-wide workshops at local sites, local and national AFT QuEST (Quality Educational Standards in Teaching) conferences, and national union and education organization conferences.

Reactions to the Research

Studies used during the program period included:

Beginning of the Year Classroom Management (Emmer, Evertson, & Anderson, 1980)

Teacher Praise (Brophy, 1981)

Direct Instruction (Rosenshine, 1980; Good and Grouws, 1979; Stallings, 1980)

Group Management (Kounin, 1970)

Time on Task (Fisher, 1980)

Although the AFT Educational Research and Dissemination program did not scientifically document change in teacher practice, we have substantial testimonial data to support the belief that TRLs made real changes in practice as a direct result of their involvement in the program. We are convinced of the validity of this input from teachers because of the voluntary, nonthreatening, nonjudgmental aspects of the program. Teachers had nothing to gain from falsifying reports. Feedback came in the form of self-reports (Research Action and Reaction Forms) which were recorded by the TRLs during the two years they participated in the program. These documents required teachers to note the research-based strategies that were currently built into their teaching behaviors and then describe the strategies they would initiate into their programs. Finally, they were asked to tell what happened when they tried the new strategies. TRLs repeatedly described the ways in which they rearranged their classrooms, developed more realistic consequences to help enforce classroom rules, or tried to deliver praise to students in a more specific manner. Often they told us how their students reacted to these changes. In some cases, school-wide changes came about as a result of a few teachers' input on better strategies suggested from the research. In all cases, building principals were supportive of the process, having previously agreed that they would not evaluate teacher performance based on their efforts to incorporate the research strategies into their daily teaching. In most cases, principals acknowledged that they were witnessing improvement in practice by teachers

in their schools, but they refrained, by agreement, from mandating implementation by all teachers.

When we discussed change in practice with TRLs, they told us that it was not always immediately clear that change had taken place; that growth in the program was necessarily a "slow process." But they were always enthusiastic about their newly acquired skills in understanding research-based concepts, being familiar with the names of educational researchers and their work, and utilizing a research vocabulary in discussing teaching techniques. These practices made the TRLs feel "special" and enhanced their professional self-esteem. One TRL told us:

> Before I became involved in this program I had begun to stop thinking. I was so accustomed to top-down decisions that I had used no effort and just coasted. Now, I feel like a professional. I've begun to make decisions and assume authority over my practice. Even my husband noticed the change.

The Educational Research and Dissemination process and the research information stood up to the test. Teachers were quite amazed to discover that there was some practical value to the information generated by the research. The teachers at one site discovered via Barak Rosenshine's Instructional Functions that the district-mandated CBC (Competency Based Curriculum) program was rooted in research. "So, that's where they got it" was their reaction. They further stated that they felt better equipped to handle the program as a result of their understanding of its research base.

Teacher Training

Implications for preservice training were consistently evident during the project funding period and continue to be of importance at the present time. In almost all situations when the research-based materials were presented, teachers reacted with, "Why didn't we get this when we were in training?" or, "This information should be given to all student teachers." Most teachers at the sites said they had not had a college course that dealt specifically with *classroom management*. They felt that such a course should be developed and presented, using the research materials. Further, they urged colleges of education to work harder to create in prospective teachers an interest in research and a desire to remain research users throughout their teaching careers. Perhaps colleges need to redirect the ways in which they teach and use research. We have discovered that the way in which the information is shared is as important as the information itself.

Teachers are largely uninformed about the infrastructure of the general education process. Most are unaware of the functions and impact of the Educational Centers and Laboratories on their professional lives. This information has never been presented to them. This is a service that could be provided to prospective teachers by the training institutions.

As far as research concepts are concerned, once the project's TRLs had accepted the research-based information, they usually asked "Who will inser-

vice the school principals to keep them abreast of the research strategies we will be using in the classroom?" Again, colleges of education prepare administrators as well as teachers. The research influence should be firmly established during the training process. College teachers may find that they have to "bone-up" on the kinds of research that appear to have great relevance to practice and incorporate the strategies into course presentations.

Finally, colleges of education may find it to their advantage to develop greater involvement with practicing teachers. This would tend to facilitate "theory into practice" and would result in a process of mutual benefit to all concerned. Teachers will continue to need research information provided to them in usable form. Researchers, university and college staff can benefit from teacher feedback on the workability of concepts.

Collaboration And Institutionalization

The success of the American Federation of Teachers Educational Research and Dissemination project was substantial. Teachers applied research to classroom teaching when the information was shared in a manner that was understandable, practical, and non-threatening. Since the project period netted five translated studies, it was important to establish collaborative relationships with colleges and universities at the local sites so that the supply of research would be constantly forthcoming. Deans of education from most of the major colleges in New York City, Washington, D.C., and San Francisco met with us to discuss ways of continuing the program. In every case, interest was high and funds were low. Collaborative relationships have been initiated at Fordham University, George Washington University, Stanford University, and others. Noteworthy is the relationship at Stanford where one of the San Francisco TRLs has taken sabbatical leave from teaching and is participating at Stanford as a "Distinguished Visiting Practitioner" on a tuition-free basis and is learning how to read, interpret and translate research studies. She is auditing three courses and participating with Stanford staff on a peer level. Her input as a practicing teacher is of great value to the Graduate School of Education faculty there. Funds to support her participation have been donated by the Hewlitt-Packard Foundation and AFT. Since the initiation of this process, our department has received inquiries from other major universities on how they might become involved in a similar effort. Research studies translated by this TRL will be shared with the original pilot sites, as well as with the eleven new sites now in operation in AFT locals across the country. Training for the program's new Local Site Coordinators was conducted at Skidmore College this past summer. Another training session is planned for summer 1984, when another 15 site leaders will be trained. There are approximately 150 TRLs now functioning as research resource people or in training for the role.

Conclusions

There was much to be learned in the course of the Educational Research and Dissemination process. The effectiveness of the Teacher Center model was reaffirmed by our use of the peer-to-peer training process. The teachers union can serve as an effective dissemination vehicle for transmitting professional knowledge to teachers.

Further, we were made aware of the importance of the element of time in developing and conducting the program, i.e., length of training sessions, level of acceptance, and implementation of research strategies by individual teachers. We call this process of internalization the "transformation" of research into practice.

We realized that staff development, as an on-going process, is more effective in retraining teachers than one-shot, inservice workshops.

Finally, we are assured that there is a wealth of good research on effective practice which is useful not only to practicing teachers, but also to student teachers. Research on teaching effectiveness and classroom management should be integrated into teacher education programs. Support for this conclusion has been offered by the researchers themselves who told us that they were delighted to have a mechanism through which their work was made directly accessible to teachers.

"If teaching is an activity about which we can have knowledge, is it not reasonable to contend that those who teach ought to have what knowledge is available about what it is they do?" (Fenstermacher, 1980).

The gap between research and practice need not remain permanent.

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